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CONDITIONS IN PORTO RICO

BY DR. TULIO LARRINAGA, C. E.,
Commissioner of Porto Rico at Washington, D. C.

Porto Rico is one of the most important of the islands of the West Indies; the first in size and population being Cuba and the next Santo Domingo. Then come Porto Rico and Jamaica, which are nearly equal. But we Porto Ricans consider that there is a great difference between these two islands. Porto Rico has a civilization about three hundred years old. Our educated classes, which have always been greatly in excess of those in Jamaica, have closely followed the standards of European civilization. Porto Rico, with an area of but thirty-six hundred square miles, has a population of over a million inhabitants, being one of the most thickly-populated countries in the world. It is more densely peopled than Jamaica which has suffered a great deal in recent years. When the curse of slavery was abolished, Jamaica was checked in her material development, as were the British and French colonies, and as you yourselves were in the United States.

Porto Rico is the only country in the world that abolished slavery voluntarily and deliberately by the will of her own people. We, the slaveholders, abolished slavery there. It was done in a night, without bloodshed and without friction. When by chance we secured representation in the Spanish Cortes our people united with the Spanish Republicans and passed a law that accomplished that result. The cable flashed back the news to our country, and on the following morning every slave in Porto Rico rose from his bed a free man. We not only did that, but we paid the slaveholders for their slaves. For that purpose we contracted a loan which, in principal and interest, amounted to \$14,000,000. I believe that this is something of which we may justly be proud; and it was an achievement which has not been accomplished under similar circumstances by any country in the world.

Porto Rico is a country richly endowed by nature and has always been more or less prosperous. To-day the island is suffering

from a great commercial depression caused by the loss of our markets for coffee, which is our main staple. In spite of this fact there are indications of real progress. If proof is wanting, you have only to look at the price which our coffee commands in European countries. Those countries pay the highest price for Porto Rican coffee. But we have in Porto Rico the same tariff that you have here in the States. We have there the Dingley tariff against Europe; and Europe retaliates by putting very high import duties upon our coffee. The result is that we cannot send our coffee there, where it commands a very high price, but have to send it here, to the States, and sell it at a low rate, in competition with the Rio coffee. That temporarily is a serious drawback in our financial condition. I see that Congress is preparing to remedy that evil by future legislation. I hope that the importance of remedial action may be appreciated by the leading men of Congress, and I believe that something will be done for our relief.

In the matter of education we have been more fortunate. The ablest educators have been sent to Porto Rico. Dr. Brumbaugh was successful in founding schools there; and he and Professor Lindsay, also of Philadelphia, were instrumental in establishing there an efficient system of education.

On the political side we have as the law of the land the Foraker act, which gives us some popular representation. The lower house is elected by us, but the upper house, which is called "The Executive Council," is appointed by the President of the United States. Apparently the Congress of the United States, at the time the Foraker act was framed, did not know exactly what measure of self-government to give to us. At least it was our opinion, down there in Porto Rico, that the American Congress did not for the moment care to commit itself to any specific form of government that might in the future be an impediment in the enforcement of the general policy of the country. But the American people and the American government cannot undertake to govern the island in the way the monarchies of Europe govern their possessions; the American people and the American government mean that, in accordance with the spirit of American institutions, all people living under the American flag shall have their own government. Therefore we Porto Ricans venture to hope that in the near future the Congress will allow Porto Ricans a larger measure of self-government.